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ABSTRACT

The enactment and early implementation of remedial education policy reform was examined in Massachusetts and Oklahoma. The study also addressed the question of why "stakes for students" is an increasingly attractive option in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education reform. In these states, as in others, the high levels of remediation required by college students have become a policy problem. Both Massachusetts and Oklahoma took early and strong action to address political concerns about postsecondary remediation. A number of data sources were consulted in this study. Three central themes emerged. First, in both states, remediation policy is part of a broader reform agenda. Second, it is also apparent that remediation has emerged as an issue absent of any groundswell of public concern about its extent or costs. Third, reforms in this area have evolved and changed substantially over time in both states. Examining these changes gives a sense of the complex political and institutional environment for the issue of college-level remediation. (Contains 101 references.) (SLD)

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Stakes for Students: Agenda-Setting and Remedial Education[1]

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Stakes for Students: Agenda-Setting and Remedial Education

Although the improvement of student academic performance has been on the education policy agenda for nearly two decades, most reform efforts and intellectual discussion have, until recently, focused on processes and structures within schools. Though this school-level focus has produced some successful reforms, many schools have proven to be intractable to change, and concerns over student academic performance remain prevalent in both the research community and the public at large.

It is in this environment that researchers and reformers have begun to look for answers, moving beyond the local school to the broader policy system – including post-secondary education – in which schools operate. One important stand of this work concerns itself with the incentives produced by current educational policies and governance arrangements. While researchers studying incentives have examined the impact of policies on teachers and administrators (Fuhrman & O'Day, 1996; Hanushek & Jorgenson, 1996) the core of this work looks at students and the insufficient incentives provided by existing educational policy systems for motivating high levels of student academic performance (Costrell, 1994; Powell, 1993, 1996; Bishop, 1996, 1998; Kirst, 1997).

This concern about incentives and motivation has influenced policy makers and practitioners in a number of ways. Within elementary and secondary education,

calls for "high stakes" students assessments and curriculum–based examinations for high school graduation have become increasingly common. Since 1997, ten states and a number of large urban districts such as Chicago and New York have passed laws or adopted regulations that link student promotion and graduation to scores on state or local tests (NGA, 1999; Quality Counts, 1999: 53-59; National Research Council, 1999). Similar trends are also evident in higher education. Over the last two decades, many states have increased admissions standards and raised minimum course taking and test score requirements (Rodriguez, 1995; Russell, 1998). Most prominently, thirty state legislatures, governing boards and university systems have considered, or are considering policy initiatives that limit the extent of remedial education in four-year universities or deny altogether college admissions to students who fail placement tests. Eleven states or state systems have enacted legislation or regulations in this area (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998; Crowe, 1998; Shaw, 2000, Blair, 2000).[2]

Since poor and minority students are often likely to be enrolled in such courses, the way in which remediation is approached has the potential to significantly affect the educational access and mobility of this segment of the population.[3] Yet we

[2] The states include Massachusetts, New York (CUNY), Ohio, Virginia, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, Utah, Colorado and California (CSU). Kentucky is currently reviewing remedial policies at the state's two and four year institutions. Texas requires placement testing of all students who enroll in public colleges.

[3] According to data reported in Levin & Koski (1997: 13-15), 19% of all African-American and Hispanic students enrolled in one or more remedial classes, versus 11% of white students, for the 1992-1993 academic year. Among dependent students, 22% of those taking remedial classes reported an annual family income of less than $20,000, while only 14% of those students not enrolled in remedial classes reported an income below $20,000.

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know little about the ways in which remedial education policy is developed and implemented at the state level, nor how this issue got on the policy agenda in the first place. This paper remedies this gap through an examination of the enactment and initial implementation of remedial education policy reforms in two states – Massachusetts and Oklahoma. In doing so, the paper also addresses the question of why "stakes for students" are an increasingly attractive option in elementary, secondary and post-secondary educational reform.

2. Remediation as a Policy Problem

Perhaps no issue in American public higher education has engendered as much discussion and controversy in recent years as remedial education. In numerous states, politicians and the media have decried the growth in college freshman underprepared for college and the added financial burden this poses for state educational systems. Many citizens and policy makers see remediation as paying for the same education twice. Not surprisingly, concerns over remediation have produced an array of state and institutional policy initiatives aimed at limiting the cost and extent of college-level remediation. The City University of New York (CUNY) has been at the forefront of these policy developments with its recent proposal to end the practice of remedial education at its four-year institutions.

Within this range of activity, states and institutions are taking different approaches to making policy in this area, and defining the "problem" of remediation in slightly different ways. A 1998 SHEEO study (Crowe, 1998) identifies three distinct remedial policy approaches in the states. Some states, such as Massachusetts and Florida, employ negative incentives by placing caps on the number of, or phasing out all together the admission of students with academic deficiencies to four-year institutions. Other states such as Arkansas and Georgia instead provide positive incentives for students by tying scholarship programs to the successful completion of a college preparatory curriculum. Finally, another group of states, most notably Ohio, believe that reducing or eliminating remediation requires a system-level response at both university and secondary levels along with a strong partnership among state educational institutions focused on improving student academic preparation.

This paper focuses less on these differences than commonalities across states on the remediation issue.[4] In all of these states, high levels of remediation have become defined as a policy problem. In each state, the focus of policy is on improving student preparation for college. Where some policy observers see remediation as a consequence of unmotivated students and low admissions standards others focus the blame upon secondary schools for poorly preparing students for college. In either case, the thrust of remediation policy involves changing the behavior of students and

[4] Data for this paper is drawn from an ongoing study – Remedial Measures: A Study of State-level Remediation Policies – that compares remedial education reforms in Massachusetts, Oklahoma and Ohio.

teachers by increasing the consequences, or stakes, attached to student academic performance. Performance, in nearly all instances, as measured by placement and other examinations at best loosely aligned with high school curricula.

So how did this situation come to be, how did remediation emerge as a policy problem across a large number of states? One possibility is that the sheer magnitude of remediation is growing – that, in effect, the problem is self-evident. Evidence to support such a conclusion is at best limited. The most recently available data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) shows that 78% of all four-year institutions offered at least one remedial course in 1995, compared with 82% for the academic year 1983-1984. Work by Clifford Adelman at the U.S. Department of Education (1999) uses student transcript data to show that the percentage of college students taking at least one remedial class stayed roughly the same between 1973 and 1992, during a period where college-going rates rose substantially (NCES, 1996; Schrag, 1999).[5]

While individual states may have seen increases in the cost and extent of remediation, such data is notoriously unreliable. A recent study by David Breneman and William Haarlow (1998) shows that states and state higher education systems are in little agreement about how to measure the costs of remediation or the number of

[5] The same 1996 NCES report provides some evidence of increasing rates. In a question asking institutions whether there had been an increase in the number of students enrolled in remedial courses, 47% indicated these enrollments had remained the same, 39% reported increased remedial enrollments and 14% reported decreasing enrollments.

students enrolled these classes, whether called remedial, developmental or something else. The ambiguity of these measures also makes it likely that there will be sharp disagreement among concerned parties regarding the costs, causes and consequences of college-level remediation.[6]

A second answer to the question posed above links remediation with recent campaigns to overturn affirmative action in college admissions (see Orfield and Miller, 1998; McDonough, 1999). Certainly, these issues are related. In each case, high stakes tests are used to determine whether students are prepared or qualified for higher education. Both sets of reforms theorize that students may be better served by entering institutions that match their level of ability or current academic achievement. Both reforms have major implications for minority student access and mobility. Yet despite these links there are also crucial differences across these two issues. Affirmative action reforms are all of recent vintage and have all only entered the policy agenda in a handful of states such as California, Texas, Florida and Washington. Remediation as a policy concern dates back at least a decade and has spread much more widely across the states. Further, remediation reforms implicate all of the public universities within a state, not merely the most selective ones, such as the University of California campuses. It is no coincidence that two institutions at the

[6] Many states – Illinois, for example – claim not to offer any remediation at its four-year institutions. Recent research by Kirst et al (personal communication), identifies 11,278 students in Illinois taking one or more remedial classes, 6.9% of the total undergraduate population at the state's four year colleges.

center of the debate – CUNY and Ohio State – are symbols of open admission and access. Remediation, more than affirmative action, seems to be driven by fundamental questions about the identity of heretofore less-selective, or non-selective, institutions of higher learning.

3. Theory and Methods

All of this suggests that the emergence of the remediation issue is a political puzzle worth exploring. Current research in this area though is still fairly limited. Shaw (1997, 2000) has produced two excellent papers examining variation in the way policy makers and higher education institutions – including community colleges – define and implement remedial education programs. In the more recent study, she compares policy characteristics in Massachusetts and Maryland with an eye towards understanding differences in remediation policies "both within and across states and their educational systems (2000: 17)." Gumport & Bastedo (2000) have recently written about the history and politics of the remedial education controversy at CUNY. Beyond these studies (see also Trombley, Doyle & Davis, 1998), no other research to date looks specifically at the politics of remediation, or reports on the early implementation of these policies.

With this in mind, this paper asks two questions: 1) how did college-level remediation get on the policy agenda in Massachusetts and Oklahoma and 2) what

kinds of policy interventions are these two states employing to address concerns about remediation? Massachusetts and Oklahoma were selected for study for two main reasons. First, both states took early and strong action to address political concerns about post-secondary remediation (Oklahoma in 1993, Massachusetts in 1996). As "early adopters" they provide a more extensive database on adoption and implementation than most states. Second, the two states are quite different in terms of demographics, politics, educational governance and demand for higher education. Identifying commonalties in such diverse states can lead us towards a greater understanding of the broader political and intellectual underpinnings of this particular policy movement.

In answering the questions posed above, I build on recent cross-disciplinary scholarship on agenda-setting and social problem definition. At any time, only a handful of issues vie for public attention and action. In such a process, how problems come to be defined – their magnitude, posited cause, and potential solution – becomes a crucial determining variable. Yet, as Portz (1996: 372) writes, "problem definitions are not objectives statements...they are matters of interpretation and social definition." Political actors construct interpretations of events, institutions and individuals in order to persuade others and potentially advance a particular policy proposal (Cobb & Elder, 1972; Kingdon, 1984; Stone, 1989, 1997; Rochefort & Cobb, 1994; Howlett & Ramesh, 1995).

Efforts to persuade are advanced through the creation of what Stone calls "causal stories" (1997: 189). A causal story offers an explanation for the existence and amelioration of a particularly problematic policy condition. Poor student preparation for college, for example, can be explained with reference to weak student motivation, low academic standards, and/or poor communication and articulation across secondary and post-secondary systems. As a regular part of the agenda-setting process, political actors construct these implicit models of causation – "theories of action" – that link defined problems with proposed solutions (Argyris & Schon, 1982; Hoffman, 1995; Weiss, 1995; Hatch, 1998). These theories then become the basis for the formal law, policy or regulation adopted by a state (Malen et al, 1999; Bulkley, 1999; Roderick, Bryk and Associates, 1999).

This paper particularly concerns itself with how students – their motivation, dispositions, and control over their own learning – are constructed by members of the public, the media, and state and institutional policy makers.[7] Data comes primarily from state policy documents and newspaper and other journalistic accounts of remediation policy making. Analysis of policy documents was employed to reconstruct in finer detail the specifics of each state's remedial policy initiative(s). The news media play a crucial dual role in agenda setting – in both chronicling and reinforcing certain conceptions of problems in the public eye. For each state, a

[7] Constructions of students are at times closely linked with those of secondary schools and post-secondary institutions.

Lexis-Nexis search was conducted for the years between 1989 and 1999, using the following search terms: Remedial Education; Remediation; Remedial Classes, Developmental Education; College Admissions; Admissions Standards; and School Reform. After an initial review, additional search terms (i.e. Oklahoma Higher Education Board of Regents, Massachusetts Board of Higher Education) were included to follow up certain lines of inquiry. A second newspaper for Oklahoma – The Daily Oklahoman – was added after the initial searches were completed to supplement Lexis-Nexis reporting from the Tulsa World. Searches were also done of the Education Week and State Higher Education Officers (SHEEO) archives. Though interviews with key state and institutional policy makers are being conducted as part of a larger study of state-level remediation policies, this paper does not present any of the interview data.[8]

In comparing Massachusetts and Oklahoma, three central themes emerge. First, remediation policy is part of a broader reform agenda in both states to raise standards for admission to state college and universities. Second, remediation has emerged as an issue in these two states absent any significant groundswell of public concern about its extent or overall costs. Policy makers, legislators, business leaders and other elites are the key players pushing remediation onto the policy agenda. Third, reforms in this area have evolved and changed substantially over time in both

[8] See note 4.

states, suggesting a dynamic policy environment around remedial education and student college preparation.

4. Remediation and the Broader Reform Context

Concerns about remediation must be understood in the broader context of recent efforts at the state level to raise college admissions standards. Historically, many state higher educational institutions had wide discretion and autonomy in setting their own policies for admitting students. Beginning around the early 1980's, state higher educational agencies and legislatures began taking an active interest in setting admissions standards at state colleges and universities, particularly for first year freshman. In many cases, specific criteria (test scores, GPA, class rank) were adopted for admissions, with some states specifying the core curricula students must take in high school. State policy makers also began creating tiered systems that set different standards for different levels of selectivity within state systems – along the lines of the California model. Once set, states have continued to tinker with these policies, usually by raising minimum criteria and increasing course-taking requirements (Rodriguez, 1995; Russell, 1998).

In Massachusetts, concerns over college admissions standards date back to 1993, and the appointment Stanley Koplik as the first permanent chancellor of the state's Higher Education Coordinating Council (later the Board of Higher Education).

The Council (Board) is responsible for the management of 29 colleges and the multi-campus University of Massachusetts system, serving approximately 175,000 to 200,000 students. Early in his tenure, Koplik made a series of campus visits around the state. Afterwards, in a series of press visits, he lamented the declining quality of applicants, going so far as to accuse the state's colleges and universities of accepting large numbers of unqualified students in order to sustain enrollment levels. As a result, campuses were "spending a lot of time on remediation (Boston Globe, 11/5/93)." In March of 1994, the Chancellor helped pass a proposal that codified new admissions standards in the state's public colleges. Minimum grades for admission were adopted and the number of special admits allowed by campuses was reduced significantly.

A year and a half later, Koplik and the new Chairman of the Coordinating Council, James Carlin, pushed through a more systematic reform. The new standards for first year freshman raised the minimum GPA for automatic admissions to 2.6 for state colleges and 2.75 for the University of Massachusetts (all campuses), while increasing required coursework to 16 units. Students who did not meet the minimum GPA were evaluated on a sliding scale based on their SAT or ACT score. By 1998, minimum GPA requirements would rise to 2.7 and 3.0 respectively (Boston Globe, 12/10/1995).[9]

[9] Carlin was appointed by William Weld as part of the then governor's effort to raise the visibility and authority of the Higher Education Coordinating Council.

In Oklahoma, admissions standards were first brought to the policy agenda through the 1985 Higher Education Task Force, founded by Hans Brisch, the Chancellor of the State Regents for Higher Education, and Carolyn Thompson, the Chair of the House Education committee. This first wave of reforms were designed explicitly to "motivate high schools," as Thompson put it, and raise the quality of graduates coming from the state's secondary schools (Tulsa World, 9/30/89). The task force recommended minimum requirements for test scores, grades and coursework to be phased in over the next seven years. After 1992, students would be required to have an ACT score of 22, or a class rank in the top 2/5 of their graduating class to be admitted to the state's "comprehensive universities" (University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State). In 1993, coursework requirements were raised from 11 to 15 units.

Then in 1996, minimum class rank requirements were increased to the top 1/3 for entry to the comprehensive universities, for those students not scoring 22 on the ACT. These students were now additionally required to have a minimum GPA of 3.0. Meanwhile, at the state's "regional universities" (e.g. University of Tulsa), minimum ACT scores grades and class-rank requirements were also revised upwards (Russell, 1998: 61)

Throughout these debates, the term "remediation" was seldom used. Nevertheless, the tenor of the discussion about standards, college preparation and

school-university articulation strongly foreshadowed the more explicit discussions to come.

5. Elites and Agenda-Setting

Though remediation has been a highly visible policy issue in both states, there is little evidence that public concern is a driving force behind this. Newspaper accounts of public involvement on this issue are rare, and in our data searches we uncovered no letters to the editor or other kinds of citizen commentary on remediation. Instead, debates about remediation were started and sustained by policy elites both within and outside higher education, including the news media itself. In Massachusetts, the two major players were Stanley Koplik and James Carlin. Koplik came to Massachusetts from a position as Director of the Kansas Board of Regents. Upon taking over in Massachusetts, he saw his mission to raise the reputation of the state system, in part by stemming the declining quality of applicants. Koplik quickly turned his attention to remediation, noting that it was "a gross mismatch of resources to have four-year colleges teaching high school material" and the state needed to find "better and cheaper way(s) to address the remedial needs of students (Boston Globe, 12/5/93)."

James Carlin entered educational policy making in Massachusetts from the business community. A millionaire head of a string of real estate and insurance companies, Carlin was best known in the state through his work as receiver for the

city of Chelsea where he was credited with saving the city from possible financial ruin. In December of 1995, Carlin was appointed Chairman of the Higher Education Coordinating Council by then Governor William Weld. Right from the beginning, Carlin's stated his view that the state's colleges and universities should get out of the business of remediation and shift all precollegiate course-work to the community colleges. "It's unfair to students, parents, faculty and taxpayers," he argued, "to admit kids who clearly are not prepared to do the work (Boston Globe, 12/10/95)."

Though the potential for turf battles was very real, Koplik and Carlin worked together to push through the aforementioned admissions standards in March of 1996. A few weeks later, the Council spurred by a recent series in the Boston Globe on remediation and "by the desire to upgrade the system's quality and reputation," adopted a cap on the admission of students needing remediation to the state's four-year colleges (Boston Globe, 12/5/93). The cap was to be phased in incrementally. During the academic year of 1997, colleges were limited to a 10% cap, lowering to 5% in 1998. Remediation instead would be relegated to the state's 15 community colleges (Boston Globe 3/17-18/96).

Carlin noted that such measures were necessary to get the four-year institutions "focused on higher–level academic pursuits (Boston Globe 12/10/95)." Nevertheless, the vote was not unanimous. Two members of the council, Edward Sullivan and Jane Edmonds, opposed the vote on grounds that restricting remediation

to the community college would reduce access and limit opportunities for older students and minorities. Sullivan himself noted that he had taken remedial courses as an adult at UMass-Boston, wondering in his press comments whether the new policy was supported by research. Koplik rejected such criticisms, claiming the Council was not limiting access but "channeling student(s) into what will be a better opportunity." Regardless, the proposed changed would have a significant influence on overall enrollments. Remedial rates in 1995 ranged from 13 percent of incoming freshman at UMass-Amherst and 23 percent at Lowell, to the state colleges such as Fitchburg State where over 40 percent of freshman were in remedial classes (Boston Globe 3/17/96, 3/19/96).

To complement these efforts, the Council raised the public profile of the Arthur Gelb College-to-School Report, which was used to provide information to secondary schools regarding student performance and retention in college. Though much data was disseminated, Koplik and his supporters on the Council were most eager to transmit – both to the schools and publicly – the percentage of public high school graduates needing remedial work (Boston Globe, 5/15/97; College-to-School Report, 1997, 1998, 1999).

In Oklahoma, the range of individuals involved was larger and more diffuse. This was due both to the more explicit links between the higher education and secondary issues on the topic of remediation and to the political environment

surrounding education in the state. After the admissions reforms of 1985, Brisch, Thompson, James Barnes, the Chairman of the State Board of Regents, and others took part in Task Force 2000, a citizens committee empowered in 1989 to develop model school reform legislation. Their efforts led to HB 1017, a comprehensive package of finance and curriculum reforms passed with bipartisan support in 1990. HB 1017 was driven by concerns about the average ACT scores in the state – then 17 – in light of the new college admissions standards being phased in. As such, many of the reform proposals were targeted at improving student preparation for college. A new common core curriculum was mandated to link to the new admissions standards, and the state's first mandatory testing program was adopted (Tulsa World, 9/20/89; Daily Oklahoman, 8/28/89; 9/09/89; 4/25/90).

Brisch meanwhile proposed that the Regents begin their own competency testing program to provide "information on the progress of high school graduates in the higher education system (Daily Oklahoman, 8/17/91)." Eventually this proposal turned into the Policy Statement on the Assessment of Students for Purposes of Instructional Improvement and State System Accountability, an initiative aimed at reducing remediation and improving student preparation. Beginning the following fall, all students, including those admitted to state campuses based on their class rank or under an alternative admission program were required to score a minimum of 19 on all four sections of the ACT, or face remedial classes. Campuses were encouraged

to develop and administer their own assessments to further determine student preparedness. The two-year colleges were also required to assess their students prior to enrolling them in classes (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 1991: 2; Daily Oklahoman, 10/5/91; 11/7/92).

In 1993, the Regents mandated remediation for all underprepared students. This new policy was not without controversy. Critics argued that the changes would discourage students – particularly from Tulsa and rural areas – from attending state colleges. To mitigate some of these concerns, two additional pieces were added to the remedial reform package. A committee of faculty was empowered to formalize the core skills and competencies students would need to succeed as college freshman. The Regents also collaborated with ACT to create the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS), a voluntary assessment that would provide 10th grade students and school personnel with feedback about students probable college performance, given their current achievement levels (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2000: 1-3).

Over the next four years, the Regents implemented the new policy without much comment or public opposition. Indeed, it seemed their implicit policy theory was proving itself at least somewhat successful. Though remediation rates rose at both four-year and two-year campuses between 1992 and 1994, policy makers had expected this during the first few years of implementation. From 1994 to 1996, the

percentage of students enrolled in remedial classes at the four-year campuses declined from 42 % to 34%. The percentage of freshman scoring above 19 on the ACT increased steadily after 1992, while the number of students taking the test rose from 50 to 68% by 1996. As well, remediation rates were dropping at both the State Comprehensive and Regional Universities, while steadily increasing at the two-year colleges (Tulsa World, 1/25/97; 2/7/98; 2/12/98). By 1998, the editorial page of the Tulsa World was calling the new policy an unqualified success:

> College is not the place to learn to read or to learn basic mathematics, English or science, so its encouraging to learn that the number of freshman requiring remedial courses is failing...It is unfair to students who do not meet minimum standards to admit them into classes they are likely to fail, nor is it fair to taxpayers who foot most of the bill. It makes sense to require unprepared students who enroll in remedial classes at the junior-college level – and prove themselves academically – before they move into the four-year or comprehensive universities (2/12/98).

For the Regents, the signaling effect of the admissions and remedial policy changes were the greatest contributor to its short run success, and offered the greatest potential to "better prepare students for college," and reduce the post-

secondary dropout rate (Tulsa World, 2/2/96). Nonetheless, other interests in the state, most notably the new Republican Governor Frank Keating, decided to spin the data on remediation in a different way. Decrying the remediation rates as a sign of abject failure of the public schools, Keating began criticizing HB 1017 as an unsuccessful reform cooked up by the teachers union and the state's Democrats. Keating also began proposing that the Regents transfer the cost of remediation back to the schools. In doing so, he threw his support behind HB 2634, a bill introduced earlier that year by fellow Republican Larry Ferguson, that sought to charge school districts for any tuition and fees students paid to state colleges for remedial classes, on grounds of negligence (Tulsa World, 7/7/96; 7/13/96).

6. The Evolution of Remedial Policy

While both Massachusetts and Oklahoma have sustained their remedial policy initiatives to the present day, changes both major and minor have been made in the policies since 1996. These changes are worth examining to get a greater sense of the complex political and institutional environment the issue of college-level remediation sits within.

Initially, many college administrators and campus leaders in Massachusetts expressed reservation over the caps on remediation. At UMass-Amherst, academic vice president Joseph Deck acknowledged that the need for remedial courses is

"higher than we'd like," but said, "it is unreasonable to suggest our students be required to take courses away from our own campuses (Boston Globe, 3/19/96)." Soon though, state and community colleges were raising their own admissions standards. In March of 1996, Fitchburg State increased its minimum GPA requirement and created, for the first time, a baseline Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) score for admissions (Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 3/29/96). Vincent Mara, president emeritus of Fitchburg State, wrote an editorial in the Worcester Telegram & Gazette, criticizing remediation as a "waste of educational resources" and a major cause of the "dumbing-down" of both schools and colleges (Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 4/4/96). That same year, Quincy College, a community college, changed a long standing policy that June by no longer giving credit towards graduation for remedial courses in reading, writing and math (The Patriot Ledger, 6/7/96).

In an interview with the Worcester paper later that year, Carlin continued to press the issue; calling the recent policy changes a way to "raise the level of prestige" of UMass and the other state schools. In this regard, moving remediation to the community colleges, or privatizing these services, was a way to increase "efficiency and accountability" in the state's system of public higher education (Worcester Telegram and Gazette, 12/19/96). Five months later Carlin was back, this time waiving the 1997 College-to-School Report, that showed, as might be expected,

significant numbers of the state's high schools students taking remedial classes. Carlin proposed that the worst offending schools reimburse the colleges for the cost of remediation (Boston Globe, 5/15/97). "We're tired of doing the high school's work for them," he was quoted in the Boston Globe. Carlin's payback plan was endorsed the next day by John Silber, the chairman of the State Board of Education as a way to stop schools from issuing "fraudulent diplomas" (Boston Globe, 5/16/97). Koplik was somewhat more measured, but left no doubt that he would use the School-College Reports as a club to hold schools accountable. He went on to exhort high schools to do a better job of matching students to the "right colleges," even if that meant the local community college (Boston Globe, 5/15/97).

The attack on the high schools significantly raised the political stakes surrounding the remediation issue in Massachusetts. State school commissioner, Robert Antonucci, who worked on the college-to-school report, admitted that he expected the report would be used "in a less punitive fashion (Boston Globe, 5/15/96)." Shooting back in the Globe, Antonucci and a handful of school administrators and Democratic legislators claimed the state colleges were equally at fault for admitting students in order to sustain enrollments. Koplik could hardly disagree having made similar criticisms throughout his tenure. Still, he took refuge in the policy changes of the previous year, arguing that the state system is now doing

a better job of "sorting students to where they are more likely to get the kind of support they need (Boston Globe, 5/17/96)."

One of Koplik's lingering concerns was that campuses were using their own placement tests, and thus standards were not uniform across the system. By the middle of 1998, with a new placement test in hand – The College Board's Accuplacer – he began lobbying for new changes in admissions standards. In September of 1998, the Board of Higher Education acted. Beginning with the next year's class, all students were required to obtain passing grades on math, reading and writing portion of the Accuplacer prior to starting classes in the fall. Those students who did not pass all three subjects had to take their remedial courses at a community college. Additionally, starting in fall 2000, minimum SAT and grade-point averages would rise again at UMass and the state colleges. Finally, the revised policy also restricted the percentage of students below minimum admission standards that colleges could admit, from 12 to 10 percent. The Chancellor framed these changes in an interview with the Boston Globe around an ever-increasing demand for accountability. The same Globe article also reported that the ranking of UMass-Amherst had risen 59 places in the US News and World Report rankings published earlier that year (Boston Globe, 9/17/98).

In Oklahoma, Keating's attack on the schools notwithstanding, the Regents were committed to providing remedial classes and "comfortable," as Vice-Chancellor

for Academic Affairs Cindy Ross put it, with the distribution of remediation across the three tiers of the system (Tulsa World, 7/27/96). Questions though were being raised within the system itself. In 1996, James Halligan, the President of Oklahoma State, formally requested permission for State to admit up to 20% of its freshman class through alternative admissions standards. Regents' policy allowed campuses to admit only 8% by alternate means. Halligan's major concern was that the ACT standard of 22 – scheduled to rise to 23 the next year – shut out many of the rural students OSU had historically served. The Regents were opposed to Halligan's proposal, on grounds that it would weaken a policy signal that "encourages high school students to push themselves academically." Ultimately, the Regents held their ground and the Halligan proposal failed (Tulsa World, 9/1/96).

Two years later, it was the University of Oklahoma's turn. Under the proposal, OU sought by 2000 to raise its minimum ACT score to 24, absent a 3.0 GPA and class rank in the top 30 percent. Oklahoma State would retain its existing standards. Though ultimately approved, the plan ran into strong opposition from two Regents. Robert McCormick, a banker from Stillwater, criticized the policy as little more than a way to raise OU's national ranking. "As an OU graduate, it may be fun to pretend that I graduated from a highly ranked institution. But that was a long time ago...Unless we are focused on student success, I'm not sure this (policy) is appropriate (Tulsa World, 10/30-31/98)."

In making his case, McCormick tapped into growing concerns about the number of college graduates the state was producing. Keating had set out a goal in his 1999 state of the state address that 1/3 of the state's student should be earning college degrees. The Governor and his education secretary Floyd Coppedge argued that remediation rates, by lowering standards, were the major barrier to producing more graduates. They proposed further caps on remedial enrollment at four-year institutions, along with an expansion of the high school core curriculum (Daily Oklahoman, 2//26/96; 7/30/97; Tulsa World, 7/13/98; 2/11/99).[10] Sensing a new attack afoot from the governor's office, the Board of Regents also took on the graduation issue. Along with expanding the use of EPAS to more districts, Brisch proposed an ambitious new initiative – Brain Gain 2010 – a plan to increase the proportion of Oklahoman's with a bachelor's degree from 20 to 28 percent, an addition of 203,000 degree holders. Initially only a few policy changes in support of the plan were proposed – more courses in math and science that raised the high school core curriculum to 15 units (Tulsa World, 2/10/99; 3/14/99).

In December of 1999, though, the Regents pushed through what could only be interpreted as a partial rollback of admissions standards. Students with a 3.0 GPA in the 15 required units were now eligible for admission to OU or OSU regardless of

[10] Keating and Coppedge dubbed this proposal the "4X4" plan, borrowing from a similar policy in Mississippi that required all high school students to take a core curriculum of 4 units of English, math, social studies and science (Daily Oklahoman, 1/30/98). The 4x4 plan failed made its way out of the education committee in February of 1999. A significantly watered down version was passed later that year.

their class rank or ACT score. Similarly, a 2.7 in the "core" was now sufficient at the regional universities. AP or IB credits would also be given additional weighting under the new policy. Though framed as an effort to enhance incentives for rigorous course taking, enrollment concerns seemed the major driving force. At the comprehensive universities, enrollment had stagnated since the early 90's, while decreasing significantly at some of the regionals. Given the political environment, the Regents no doubt found attractive a proposal that would increase admissions eligibility for hundreds of Oklahoma students each year (Tulsa World, 1/30/99, 11/28/99, 12/3/99).

Brisch and his fellow Regents could always respond by noting that the original problem – the ACT gap – had been partially solved. The percentage of students scoring below 19 on the ACT had strongly decreased – in each of the four subjects – since 1994 (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2000: iv).[11]

7. Raising the Stakes for Students

Those knowledgeable about recent policy debates in elementary and secondary education will undoubtedly find the accounts of policymaking described above strikingly familiar. Remedial reforms are only one of a broader class of policies that

[11] Declines in the percentage of students scoring below 19 went down from roughly 32 to 23% in English, 39 to 28% in Math, 24 to 18% in Science and 26 to 19% in Reading. Worth further exploration is the fact that the number of students failing placement tests at the campuses increased in all three subjects during the same period.

seek to motivate students by raising the stakes for their academic performance. Why is recent educational policy so enamored with stakes for students? One person who has tried to answer this question is David Labaree, an educational sociologist and historian. Labaree (1997) frames high stakes promotion and retention policy making as a battle over status attainment. While the individual return to education continues to expand, more people also have more credentials than ever before and the exchange value of credentials drops.[12] As this happens, middle-class parents – a powerful political constituency – become anxious "that the educational system is not providing the kind of competitive advantage they want" for their children. This leads to parental mobilization in support of policies that "create losers" while widening academic distinctions among students. Labaree (1997) sums up his argument in the following way:

> Making promotion from grade to grade more difficult, raising the level of achievement required to obtain a high school diploma, and increasing standards for college – all would increase the numbers of failures and thereby increase the relative benefit that educational credentials will be able to provide for those who succeed (70-72).[13]

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[12] Though the wage gap between between high school and college graduates has been steadily expanding (see Levy & Murnane, 1992), some evidence suggests that entry level wages (in effect, the exchange value of credentials) for college graduates are holding steady, or even slightly declining, when adjusted for inflation (Mishel, Bernstein & Schmitt, 2000).

[13] Labaree (1997: 70-72)

Labaree's theory is an intriguing one, and worth exploring further in both K-12 and post-secondary policy settings. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, one problem with this argument is the lack of evidence of middle class mobilization in Massachusetts and Oklahoma around the issue of remediation. Now parents may tacitly support such policies through their very inaction, but this makes for a weaker argument. Indeed, one can make the case that most middle-class mobilization around standards and assessments has been in opposition to these policies (see Hoff 2000; Lindsay, 2000). Further, survey data[14] suggest that parents have somewhat, mixed feelings about these high stakes policies. On the one hand, most respondents agree with the premise that "if you ask more, you get more" from students. This is why most people oppose social promotion and support retention. On the other hand, a 1997 Newsweek survey suggests that parents of children in grades K-8 support the promotion of underachievers when there is "intensive remedial help" for these students. Though this same group was not probed for their views on college-level remediation, one might expect similar kinds of ambivalence (Johnson & Duffert, 1996: 2-3). A recent survey by John Immerwahl (2000) shows that *access* is the public's main concern in higher education, with a good portion (45%) of this sample believing that a substantial number of qualified students are denied opportunities to attend college (13).

[14] This report by Public Agenda – Standards and Accountability: Where the Public Stands – (Johnson & Duffert, 1999) summarizes findings from ten recent surveys on educational issues.

A similar survey of over 600 higher education leaders and policy makers shows a strikingly different set of beliefs. Asked about problems facing colleges, 88% of the sample identified "too many new students need remedial education." This was the most identified problem. 76% of the sample support "raising admissions standards" as an effective way to improve higher education (Immerwahl, 1999: 28, 32). These same leaders further believe that "the lack of student motivation and responsibility" is the greatest obstacle to access, more so than money. In this way, higher education leaders support the notion that college-age youth have a greater burden of responsibility for what happens to them – when students fail placement exams, do poorly in classes, or drop-out of school it is generally their own fault (Immerwahl, 1999: 8-9).

The Immerwahl survey corresponds well with the findings of this study. In both Massachusetts and Oklahoma it was higher education leaders and policy makers – elected and appointed officials, those in governing and coordinating boards, professors, administrators and members of the business community – who brought the remediation issue onto the policy agenda. Future research is needed to further probe leaders' views on issues like remediation, and how these shape specific state, system and institutional policies. One can make the case that Labaree is partly correct, that proposals to end or cap remediation are driven by status attainment concerns – the desire by policy makers and administrators to create "competitive

advantage" for their institutions. Institutions or systems that restrict remediation signal to the outside world that their standards are high, while raising the quality of incoming classes. In a game where reputation and status are supremely important, this argument has strong face validity. Further examination of what Amy Stuart Wells and colleagues call the "assumptive worlds" of higher education policy makers can further test the applicability of Labaree's theory to the remediation case (Wells et al, 1999).[15]

Three additional questions might also be addressed through further research. One question is whether the dynamics of policy making are similar in other cases of high stakes testing – such as K-12 exit exams or state and local promotion policies. Do K-12 policymakers hold beliefs and attitudes similar to their higher education counterparts? Are middle-class parents, as Labaree suggests, active participants in these elementary and secondary policy making processes? Are K-12 and higher education debates over high stakes student testing linked in certain states?

A second area for future research involves the consequence of these reforms for students. Research on high stakes testing is beginning to emerge in the K-12 area (see Roderick, Bryk and Associates, 1999; Muller & Schiller, 2000) and higher education scholars would be well served to look similarly at remediation. How do

[15] Note that those shaping higher education policy making – elected officials, professors, administrators, college presidents, and the business community – are likely to vary considerably in their views. Evidence reported to date (Immerwahl, 1999) suggests little important variation on issues particularly pertinent to remediation and student college preparation. Further inquiry beyond surveys, as suggested from the cases presented in this paper, may well tell a very different story.

new remedial policies impact students? Do substantive differences in policy design, such as we have seen in Massachusetts and Oklahoma, have important consequences for students' educational opportunities and experiences? Such research will help us better understand whether this new generation of remedial policy reforms will help or hinder efforts to enhance access and equity in public higher education.

A final question involves the dynamics of raising standards. What will happen to remedial policies if enrollments decline, or certain campuses lose out to others as students spread out over the system? Will pressures emerge – from parents and administrators – to roll back these policies? The initial evidence from Oklahoma supports the notion that new admissions standards are somewhat sensitive to enrollment projections and the overall demand for higher education. Moreover, the history of high stakes testing suggests that admissions standards, whether to high school or college, generally decrease, or are deemphasized during periods in which policy elites want to expand access or promote institutional development (Author, 2000). Will remediation policies suffer the same fate? Only time will tell.

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